

# CLIMATE JUSTICE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



# WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

Climate change is not a problem that may happen at some point somewhere. It's already happening on this planet and causing great damage.

And some people are impacted by climate change more than others due to geographic or socio-economic factors. It is the systemic inequality and injustice of our society that make certain people more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

As climate change accelerates, social inequality and injustice are reinforced and become even more widespread, stripping these vulnerable people of their ability to protect themselves from climate impacts and weakening their resilience to adversities, leaving them even more vulnerable.

Because historically accumulated emissions of greenhouse gasses accelerate climate change, young people and future generations still to come will be impacted by the effects of climate change for longer and more severely, even though they have not contributed to the cause of climate change as much as older generations.

As you can see, there is systemic injustice in our society that puts many vulnerable people in greater harm from climate change even though they are historically much less responsible for causing it.

Climate justice is a perspective that sees climate change as an issue of human society as a whole with focus on human rights in particular, and advocates for an equitable and just way of sharing the burden of its impacts, responsibility to take actions and the benefits of climate countermeasures.

We at the Climate Reality Project (hereinafter CRP) call not only for advancing climate change mitigations but also for achieving climate justice.



This brochure has two parts:

In this Part 1, we take a global point of view and explain the concepts of environmental justice and climate justice, which are not yet widely known or understood in Japan.

This part is based on Climate Justice 101 from CPR's global website, with editing and additional texts by CRP Japan. For the full version, please visit the webpage: <https://bit.ly/4bQGb7j>



In Part 2, we look at the current situation concerning climate justice in Japan, highlighting some specific examples.

The examples covered include: women and gender inequality; people in poverty suffering from economic disparity; workers in primary industries vulnerable to climate change; and Indigenous People living in harmony with nature whose cultural identity is threatened by climate change. These sections have been written by four CRP Japan interns, based on their research on identities that are vulnerable in today's Japanese society.

Here we are using two terms: "environmental justice" and "climate justice." Environmental justice is a broader concept of justice relating to a wide range of environmental issues. Climate change is one of these environmental issues, and climate justice focuses specifically on the issue of justice in the face of climate change.

By reading Part 1 and Part 2 together, you can see why we need environmental and climate justice and what the cause and context of the issues are, both in terms of the global historical context and the current situation, including that of Japan.

Generally, climate justice tends to be discussed in the context of inequality between nations. A common way of looking at this is to treat it as an issue between the Global North (developed countries), which is historically most responsible for causing climate change, and the Global South (developing countries), which has little responsibility but is taking the brunt of the damage done by climate change. Japan bears a major responsibility regarding this global issue as the world's fifth largest country in greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate justice is not only about inequality between countries; it is also closely related to various social issues within a country. We hope that, when we tackle huge systemic problems, looking at similar issues on the local, domestic scale will help people understand the issues and encourage them to get together to take action.

In Part 1, let's look at the unfairness of environmental impacts and measures for different groups of people and communities worldwide.

Environmental justice is widely understood as the principle that “all people and communities have the right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.”

This principle may seem obvious at first glance, but history shows that it has not always been accepted.

Decades of research have demonstrated that the primary factor making people more vulnerable to hazardous environments is race.

The movement for environmental justice opposes the ways in which environmental racism is embedded in social structures, centering on those most affected.

## The Roots and History of Environmental Justice

Communities have been fighting for environmental justice for centuries.

The modern environmental justice movement began with protests in 1982 by residents of Warren County, North Carolina – a predominantly Black community – organize protests to oppose the dumping of toxic material that would leak into their water supply.

The need for the environmental justice movement is a direct response to centuries of institutionalized and systemic racism. In other words, achieving environmental justice in the long term means dismantling these forms of oppression.

To achieve climate justice, it’s necessary to understand and address how social inequities intersect with climate change, and how the increase in temperature and expansion of injustice are closely intertwined.

Here, we introduce terms that help understand climate justice from a global perspective.



## Frontline Communities

Frontline communities experience the impacts of climate change “first and worst.”

Overwhelmingly and disproportionately, people of color, individuals in these communities have endured the incredible physical, economic, and mental burdens of climate change.

People of color breathe 37 percent more nitrogen dioxide<sup>1</sup> – a pollutant generated by cars, trucks, and buses as well as power plants, heavy equipment, and industrial boilers – than white people.

## Fenceline Communities

A fenceline community lives immediately adjacent to highly polluting facilities – think fossil fuel infrastructure, industrial parks, or large manufacturing facilities – and is directly affected by the traffic, noise, operations, and most-concerningly, chemical and fossil fuel emissions of the operation.

In the United States, the predominantly majority Black communities along the Mississippi River running from Baton Rouge to New Orleans include seven of the 10 US census tracts with the highest cancer risks in the nation.<sup>2</sup> Dubbed “Cancer Alley,” this about 140-kilometer stretch is home to more than 150 chemical plants and refineries.<sup>3</sup>

## Sacrifice Zones

Sacrifice zones are often defined as populated areas with high levels of pollution and environmental hazards, thanks to nearby toxic or polluting industrial facilities.

These areas are called “sacrifice zones” because the health and safety of people in these communities is being effectively sacrificed for the economic gains and prosperity of others.

How do places become sacrifice zones?

1 The Guardian (2017) US people of color still more likely to be exposed to pollution than white people

2 Rolling Stone (2019) Louisiana’s ‘Cancer Alley’ Is Getting Even More Toxic — But Residents Are Fighting Back

3 The Guardian (2019) ‘Almost every household has someone that has died from cancer’

One factor is the absence of proper government regulation. Another is that many times, people living in these areas lack either access to the information to know about the pollution poisoning their community or the power to make policymakers do something about it. These people are often “the wrong complexion for protection” under the law.

No surprise, individuals who live constantly exposed to high levels of pollution often end up facing worse health outcomes and long-term ailments.

One resident reports that “Out of every 10 houses, there’s a prospect of one or two people that have died of cancer,” due to the existence of “Cancer Alley” in the city where two-thirds of the population is Black.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly half of those living in fenceline areas close to industrial pollution are people of color. This is because many of these factories are built near towns where the poor and Black people, who lack the political power to stop their construction, reside.

There cannot be environmental justice as long as there are sacrifice zones that trade the health of communities of color for someone else’s bottom line.

If there are reasons to hope here, they come from the fact that activists are organizing campaigns to eradicate sacrifice zone by restoring power to affected communities and holding Big Polluters accountable.

No community should have to trade its health to fuel the prosperity of another.



4 The Times-Picayune (2019) Welcome to “Cancer Alley,” Where Toxic Air Is About to Get Worse

# Environmental Racism

Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate burden placed on people of color, who are more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards.

As we have seen, this oppression is often achieved systemically, through policies and practices that effectively place low-income and communities of color in close proximity to polluting facilities like power stations, plastics plants, and methane gas pipelines

78% of African Americans live within about 50 kilometers of a coal-fired power plant.<sup>5</sup>

Living close to pollution, people of color are exposed to a variety of harmful pollutants at a higher rate than white and higher-wealth communities. This leads to far greater rates of serious health problems in communities of color, from cancer to lung conditions to heart attacks, as well as a higher prevalence and severity of asthma, lower birth weights, and greater incidence of high blood pressure.

Black children are twice as likely to develop asthma as white children – and are 10 times more likely to die from complications from the disease.<sup>6</sup>

The issues we have discussed are all closely related to racial issues, especially in the United States.



5 The Goldman Environmental prize (2015) Environmental Racism in America: An Overview of the Environmental Justice Movement and the Role of Race in Environmental Policies

6 National Association for The Advancement of Colored People and Clean Air Task Force (2017) Fumes Across the Fence-Line

# Environmental Justice Movement

The environmental justice movement challenges injustice and unequal treatment of people of color.

In the US, the movement was born in the 1970s, when Black activists in Warren County, North Carolina organized to fight toxic dumping in their community. Right around the same time, in Houston, Texas, activists like Dr. Robert Bullard began researching and challenging racist policies that lead to 82% of the city's trash being dumped in Black communities – despite the fact that Black residents made up only 25% of the population.

Tragically, the list goes on.

Environmental justice is achieved when all people are “equally protected from environmental and health hazards and have equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”

To achieve this, we must fight against the structural racism embedded in society, such as conveniently locating power plants near Black and Latino communities or ignoring the flooding of impoverished areas during hurricanes and floods.



# Let's Fight Together

To tackle these issues together, there are things we can do. Here are three steps to get started:

## 1. Look Inside

To move forward in the fight against racist environmental policies, we must drop our defenses and open ourselves to change. That means listening – really listening – to the people of color demanding to be heard after decades of being ignored.

## 2. Start Small – But Start Now

Commit today to a single action you can take to start fighting racial injustice. Keep it small and local. Everyone starts somewhere – you just need to start. Now.

## 3. Find Allies

National organizations like the Poor People's Campaign are mobilizing for systemic change. And many Climate Reality chapters across the country are also working on climate and environmental justice issues in their backyards.

## Specifically...

- Fight for a just transition from fossil fuels that pollute frontline communities to clean, renewable energy.
- Work on policies that bring desirable green jobs and true opportunities to often overlooked communities.
- Invest in the infrastructure and disaster resilience of neglected areas to help residents safely navigate climate events such as hurricanes.
- Ensure equitable support for the recovery of all communities, not just white or affluent areas.

# Climate Migrants

We know that heatwaves, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and droughts caused by climate change are bringing about climate crisis worldwide.

Next in line are health issues, with outdoor workers and those with existing health challenges suffering the most. Additionally, homes and lives lost to floodwaters and storm surge. Crops and farms failing and the nutritional value in much of what does grow declining. Deadly diseases spreading to places that have never known them.

Is it any wonder people in many parts of the world are fleeing this environmental devastation en masse?

# Climate Migration

When a person or groups of people are forced or choose to leave their homes, temporarily or permanently, largely because of sudden- or slow-onset (more below) changes in their regional environment due to the climate crisis, it is considered climate migration. This movement can happen within a country or across an international border.

In other words, climate migrants refer to individuals who leave their homes specifically due to climate stressors like changing rainfall patterns and heavy flooding, sea-level rise, and more frequent and powerful floods and hurricanes.

In 2019 alone, 23.9 million people were internally displaced by weather disasters.

Though climate migration receives the most media attention when it crosses borders, the majority of climate migrants actually do so within their own countries.



# ○ Migrants or Refugees?

Under international law, climate migrants are not considered refugees because the environment is not considered a persecuting agent under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

It is, however, worth noting that this definition is 70 years old.

As the climate crisis worsens and climate migration increases, the definition may be in dire need of revision if climate migrants are to get the help and support they so desperately need from the international community.

If we act now, we could reduce the number of people forced to move because of the climate crisis by as much as 80 percent.

- If we cut greenhouse gas emissions now and significantly, a far lower number of people will need to migrate. This is the most impactful and obvious solution.
- We need more investment to better understand where and how climate impacts might lead to migration.
- National governments need to not only integrate climate migration into all facets of development planning but also implement policies that address migration and protect climate migrants.





In this Part 1, we have looked at global issues such as “environmental racism” and “climate migration.” Next, let’s move on to Part 2!

<https://bit.ly/4cWGz55>



The Climate Reality Project is a global initiative working to tackle climate change.

This booklet is based on “Climate Justice 101” available on the CRP headquarters website, translated, edited, and supplemented by CRP Japan as “Basic Knowledge of Climate Justice.”

The full text can be viewed here.

<https://bit.ly/4bQGb7j>



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